

Martin Wiggins *Shakespeare and the Drama of his Time* Oxford Shakespeare Topics, general editors Peter Holland and Stanley Wells (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 149 pp. ISBN 0-19-871161-1

It is an honest and rare author who admits to misgivings about the title imposed by his series editors, especially when it's the *and* he finds problematic. In this erudite book Martin Wiggins, although no poststructuralist, dissolves into a continuum the binary 'Shakespeare' *and* 'his contemporaries'. Shakespeare's rise in the mid-1590s was due, Wiggins contends, not to unique personal qualities but the absence of rivals: Greene, Marlowe, Kyd, Peele, and Lyly were gone and Jonson, Dekker, Marston, and Chapman had not arrived.

Wiggins maps the dramatic terrain from three triangulation points: Marlowe's redefinition of tragedy with *Tamburlaine* (1587), Chapman's invention of 'humours' comedy in *A Humorous Day's Mirth* (1597) and Marston's importation of Guarini's tragicomedy with his *Antonio* plays and *The Malcontent* (1600-03). This genre-centered approach yields many new solutions to old problems. If all a comedy's characters are 'humorous', whither the company clown's specialism? Chapman, and Shakespeare following him, gave the clown new work as a serious seer, which explanation improves considerably on the usual *ad hominem* account of Robert Armin succeeding William Kempe. Shakespeare emerges here as a great "completer" of advances begun by others and thus fully deserving of Robert Greene's proleptic epithet "beautified with our feathers".

200 words

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